

**Preserving Jewish Heritage in Germany.
The role of museums in terms of social reality**

A Case study by Sarai Hannah-Marie Schulz

1. Research Question: Museums as places of representation

Museums represent societal knowledge, they define the values of a society through their preservation and collections presented. This makes museums places of representation, also of existing conditions, and puts those institutions in a position of power. This power and influence indicate a responsibility for educational work concerning the present and future at the same time. In my project I am going to focus on Jewish museums in Germany and formulate the thesis that Jewish museums in Germany have a function in the service of social reality. My project follows the leading question:

To what extent can Jewish museums use the shared heritage concept to provide for more German-Jewish understanding and make a direct contribution to the prevention of Anti-Semitism?

In this context, shared heritage as a concept primarily refers to shared narratives that relate to material cultural heritage, like objects exposed in different museums. Those narratives manifest themselves within the exhibits and might develop dialogical potential through a process of reinterpretation, in order to sum up different perspectives and merge into a collective, shared memory culture. According to this interpretation of the shared heritage approach, the key approach also contains the questions:

- How and why did Jewish museums emerge in Germany? What led to the exhibitions that present (and represent) Jewish Culture and History today?
- Where do the objects on display come from? Are they per se conflicting as a materialization of culture?
- What does this mean for the museum as an institution of memory and for its task in terms of social responsibility?
- How can curation practice in Jewish museums participate in the idea of German-Jewish dialogue? Is it possible to develop shared narratives with the objective that a common but emancipative culture of remembrance is created?

I strongly believe that, through their curative practices and ideas of culture-mediating, museums can be a starting point for initiating and realizing shifts in meaning. If one follows this logic, the importance of the debate on Jewish museums and their reflection of Jewish life in Germany is totally obvious and important against the background of increasing anti-Semitic ideas due to the pandemic crisis.

2. The Jewish Museum in Munich and in Göppingen-Jebenhausen

For my case study, I choose two different Jewish museums in southern Germany as examples. I am going to explore and compare the Jewish Museum in Munich to the Jewish Museum in Göppingen-Jebenhausen. Centerpiece of the research is a detailed analysis of the exhibition. I want to focus on the museum's catalogue and the exhibits themselves. Leading questions here might be, what kind of objects are exhibited, where they come from originally and how they did find their place in the museum's exhibition.

Critically, it has to be asked, if they, as a form of materialistic heritage, are per se conflicted. For the analysis of the collections, I develop a cluster system, so that the collection can be overviewed better and different categories of expositions can be constituted. During my visit, I also want to search for (hidden) structural power and points of connection, where and whether the shared heritage concept is visible at all within the compilations. That means, in addition to the exhibits, the boards or the exhibition's setup is generally interesting for me. I want to focus on the way how the museum is contextualized and presented to the public, e.g. on the website, in its brochures and publications.

An additional expert interview will finally top the research up: I also want to include the museum curators' perspectives. Those expert interviews shall close any gaps that may arise during the research or whilst visiting the museum. They could possibly also help to correct and adjust the dispositive here, and maybe grasp the exhibition from an intentional perspective. Also, some data on why and through whom the museum was originally founded with what kind of intention can be raised whilst the interview.

3. Theoretical framework and Key concepts

Concerning my theoretical approach, I am going to focus on authors such as Nora Sternfeld, Aleida Assman, Karl Heinrich Pohl, Carmen Mörsch, Sophie Elbers, Anna Palm or Hans-Peter Killgus, just to name a few. Most of them emphasize a new perspective of

museology and pledge for new perspectives on so called cultural memory or focus on the prevention of Anti-Semitism in institutions generally.

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